DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 118 CS 512 313

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TITLE	Improving Writing Skills in the Elementary Classroom.
PUB DATE	2003-05-00
NOTE	64p.; Master of Arts Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Professional Development Field-Based Master's Program.
PUB TYPE	Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; *Classroom Environment; Elementary Education; Grade 1; Grade 5; Instructional Effectiveness; *Journal Writing; Learning Disabilities; Portfolios (Background Materials); Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation; Teaching Methods; Writing Improvement; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

The proposed study was designed to improve the writing skills of students in the targeted first and fifth grade classrooms in one elementary school located in a Midwestern suburb. The study was designed as an action research project and was conducted by four researchers during the months of September through December 2002 with 118 participants (40 first graders, 60 fifth graders and 18 faculty). Among factors influencing students' writing skills are attitude and motivation (Kear, Coffman, McKenna & Ambriosio, 2000); environmental factors (Essex, 1996; Taylor & Adelman, 1999; Townsend & Fu, 1997; Wildavsky, 1999); instruction (Nickel, 2001; Wolf & White, 2000) and learning disabilities (MacArthur, Schwartz, Graham, Molly & Harris, 1996; Thomas, 1996; Wong, Butler, Ficzere & Kuperis, 1997). According to Schaefer (2001) journal writing is the first step in preparing students for successful writing experiences. Manning (2000) stated that the use of portfolios provide students an opportunity to take ownership and pride in their work. For this reason journal writing and portfolios were selected as intervention strategies for the proposed study. To document the progress of students' writing skills, the following methods of assessment were used: a survey, observations and a document analysis. A survey was administered to teachers in order to provide insight on possible problems related to students' writing performance. Observations involved a behavior checklist designed to assist researchers with analyzing students' writing skills. A document analysis involved a review of students' journals designed to assist researchers with documenting students' progress on class writing assignments. Post-intervention data indicated an increase in the quality and quantity of the students' writing. Attitudes towards writing also changed through the course of the intervention, both in positive and negative ways. Appendixes contain a teacher survey; observation checklists; a journal writing rubric; and a document analysis log. (Contains 4 figures, 20 tables, and 39 references.) (Author/PM)

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CS CSTR 0065

ED 479 118

IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

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Margaret Wear

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May, 2003

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students in the targeted first and fifth grade traditional classrooms and first grade self-contained class for students with different needs exhibit difficulty with written language, which affects their academic progress. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes a review of students' journals, and observations of their performance on class assignments and assessments.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted site is located in the suburb of a large Midwestern metropolitan area. The elementary school includes 423 students enrolled in kindergarten through sixth grades. Of the total population, 68.6% are White, 18.4% are Black, 9% Hispanic and 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander. There are 13.2% of the children who come from families with low-income and 0.5% have limited English proficiency. The attendance rate for the school is 95.7%, and there is a student mobility rate of 17.6%. There is no chronic truancy at this site.

The average class size is 20 students per teacher for first and fifth grade traditional classrooms and eight per teacher in the self-contained classes for students with different needs. The certified staff of the targeted school is comprised of 32 women and two men with one school administrator on site. The non-certified personal includes 10 classroom assistants, one media assistant, and one secretary. The average teaching experience for the certified staff is 12.1 years.

The students are assigned heterogeneously to classrooms. With the core curriculum, students take courses daily in the following areas: mathematics (60 minutes); science (30 minutes in first grade; 40 minutes in fifth grade); English (150 minutes in first grade; 130 minutes in fifth grade); and social science (30 minutes in first grade; 40 minutes in fifth grade). In addition to core subjects, students receive 40 minutes of instruction for two periods weekly in the areas of physical education, music, art and computer technology (School Report Card, 2001).

There are three self-contained, cross-categorical classrooms for students with needs beyond the core program (one kindergarten, one first, and one for second and third grades). There are two certified teachers and two assistants for students in kindergarten; one certified teacher and one assistant for first grade; and one certified teacher and one assistant for second and third grades. In addition, there is a resource program for students who are identified through a referral process. Students identified with reading deficiencies are serviced by a specialist in this area. Likewise, students identified with speech deficiencies are also serviced by a specialist. Students who speak English as a second language are serviced through the English as a Second Language Program. Similarly, a five-week summer school program provides support for children experiencing difficulties in reading and math.

Project Tree (Together Reading Educational Excellence) is a gifted program that is included as a part of the instructional services for students. Students who are gifted and talented are grouped in clusters of four to six students in a traditional classroom. The classroom teacher differentiates the curriculum for gifted and talented students through modifications for classroom content, process, product, or the learning environment.

The technology plan currently in place provides all grade levels access to the internet and coincides with the curriculum for each grade level. All classrooms are equipped with two computers and the library contains fifteen computers, and a wireless lab containing fifteen laptops is also circulated throughout the building. All grade levels participate weekly in some type of computer activity that enhances student learning. Recently, a new program entitled Classworks was adopted. This program is designed to enhance students' mathematical and language arts skills and is utilized by all grade levels.

The Terra Nova test is used to assess student achievement in second through sixth grades in all subject areas. The Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT) is used to assess students' achievement in reading, math and writing for third and fifth grades. Likewise, science and social studies are assessed in fourth grade.

The targeted site has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA provides funding and services for classroom teachers and the school's general fund through fundraisers. In addition, the PTA sponsors various special events for students, faculty, and staff. Among others, these include field trips, assemblies, award ceremonies and teacher appreciation activities.

Students in kindergarten and first grade receive a teacher checklist evaluation regarding their first quarter progress. After the first quarter, kindergarten students receive letter grades consisting of S (successful); P (progressing); N (needs improvement). Following the first quarter, students in the first and second grades receive letter grades consisting of E (exceeds expectations); M (meets expectations); and I (improvement needed). Students in the third through sixth grades receive letter grades consisting of A (excellent work); B (good work); C (satisfactory work); D (unsatisfactory work); and F (failing work). Mid-quarter reports are sent

home for unsatisfactory work.

The principal at the targeted site offers an opportunity for students to receive recognition for positive behavior. The award is called *Power of Positive Students* (POPS). When a student demonstrates a positive behavior, a POPS slip is received. A monthly drawing is held, and fast food coupons are issued to the winning student.

The principal also provides a special luncheon for fifth and sixth grade students. Any fifth or sixth grade student receiving academic honors (a grade point average of 3.4 – 4.0) are given a McDonald's lunch provided by the principal. This incentive encourages students to remain on the principal's Academic Honors list.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted site is located in a village incorporated on December 20, 1893. The community is comprised of four square miles bordered on the west by a large suburb and on the east, south, and north by a large Midwestern city. The population is 20,821. The city is known as the "Village of Churches" due to the thirteen religious organizations serving the area. A majority of the residents work in an adjoining city. Transportation is easily accessible through rail, bus, and expressway services. A majority of the residents have low to average income with 61% of the residents being blue-collar workers. The racial and ethnic make-up is currently changing to include Hispanics and Blacks (Community Census, 2000).

There are many large businesses and banks that employ, provide services, and pay taxes. The largest tax base for schools is a shopping plaza. There is also a large hospital, which employs many of the residents. Four public elementary schools and one junior high school are located in the district. The racial and ethnic background of the district includes 80.1% White, 10.1% Black, 7.3% Hispanic, 2.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.1% Native American. Approximately 12% of

the families in the district are low income (School Report Card, 2001).

A public high school is also located in the village. Four Catholic elementary schools and two large Catholic high schools provide private educational services. In addition, there is a community college and a university located in adjacent communities. The average household income is $45,326. The homes values range from $80,000 - 275,000. Single family homes make up a large majority of the housing with apartments or townhouses providing the remaining housing.

National Context of the Problem

The need for improvement in all areas of writing is evident at both state and national levels (Wolf & Wolf, 2002). According to Phillips (1999), only partial mastery of skills and the knowledge needed for solid academic performance in writing is shown, therefore, the average (or typical) American student is not a proficient writer. With growing demands from performance-based testing, administrators, the public and their colleagues, teachers are being pressured to transform students into proficient writers. While most students do require improvement in writing, many will have to work harder to meet new standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Students with disabilities often produce writing that is short and poorly organized due largely to the fact that they experience difficulties with both mechanical aspects and the comport of writing (Wong, Butler, Ficzre & Kuperis, 1997). Thomas (1996), observed that writing difficulties among students with learning disabilities may be influenced by the way teachers are prepared and an overemphasis on teaching basic mechanical skills. As a result, Thomas believed that students with learning difficulties are more likely to be prohibited when producing authentic writing.

According to MacArthur, Schwartz, Graham, Molloy, and Harris (1996), students with learning disabilities have difficulties bridging the gap between oral and written language. For example, students' writing does not always follow the mechanics of fluency or language.

Several strategies have been developed to improve students' writing skills. One strategy, Writing Aloud/Shared Writing, deals with sentence structure (MacArthur, et al. 1996). Another, Guided Writing requires children to copy sentences from pocket charts as teachers provide support (Hendrick & Parish, 1999). Journal writing may also provide important insights about students' writing and is an important tool for children who are mainstreamed into the classroom (Montgomery, 2001). In this case, students who are mainstreamed can participate in journaling along with peers. Journals also affirm students' progress in learning across the curriculum (Montgomery, 2001). During Writers Workshop, an extensive amount of time is devoted to reading, writing and sharing ideas. Time is targeted for talking, writing, revising and conferencing with teachers (Rowe, Fitch, Bass & Smith, 2001). Lastly, the strategy Writing Process stresses student ownership and decision making as written expression develops. The Writing Process emphasizes the following stages of writing: prewriting, writing, revising and publishing (Marchisan & Alber, 2001).

Among the effective teaching methods that may support students with learning disabilities are: interactive dialogues between teachers and students (Englert & Mariage, 1996; Wong et al. 1997); self-regulation through repeated practice (Troia, Graham & Harris, 1999); attention to mechanical skills (Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbott & Whitaker, 1997); teaching students to be aware of the difficulties encountered when writing (Thomas, 1996) and creating opportunities for

writing with real-life purposes that may motivate students to write (Wong, 1997). In conclusion, effective teaching lies in the use of multiple approaches to writing instruction that may facilitate learning among students with special needs (Baker, Gersten & Scanlon, 2002).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

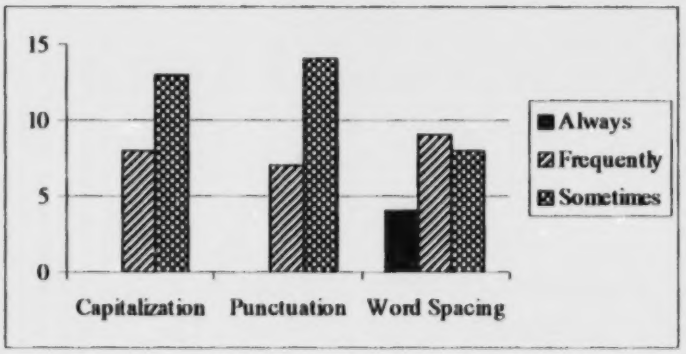
Problem Evidence

Chapter One described the general statement of the problem, immediate problem context and surrounding community in which the research took place. The national context of the problem was also described within Chapter One. This chapter will include evidence of the existing problem which includes results collected through several means of data collection. In addition to the data the chapter covers the probable causes to the targeted problem. The targeted population for this research included: 17 first grade students (Classroom A), 20 first grade students (Classroom B), 4 first grade students in a self-contained special education class (Classroom C), and 69 fifth grade students (Classroom D).

In order to document students' writing performance, a teacher survey (Appendix A), document analysis log (Appendix D) of students' performance on the previous years' Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT) and an observation checklist (Appendix B & C) to assess students' current writing skills were used.

The teacher survey was administered during the first week of school and involved 100% of the teaching staff. The teacher survey assessed students' use of language mechanics, grammar, and content. A summary of the results is presented in Figures 2.1 through 2.5. For the category of "Language Mechanics", student use of capitalization, punctuation and word spacing were combined.

Of the 21 participants surveyed, no teachers believed that students always followed the rules of capitalization, 8 noted that students frequently followed the rules of capitalization, and 13 observed that students sometimes followed the rules of capitalization in their writing. In the area of punctuation, none of the teachers believed that students always followed the rules of punctuation, 7 observed that the students frequently followed the rules of punctuation and 14 noted that students sometimes followed the rules of punctuation. For word spacing, 4 teachers observed that students always followed the rules of word spacing, 9 believed that they frequently followed the rules of word spacing and 8 noted that the students sometimes followed the rules of word spacing.

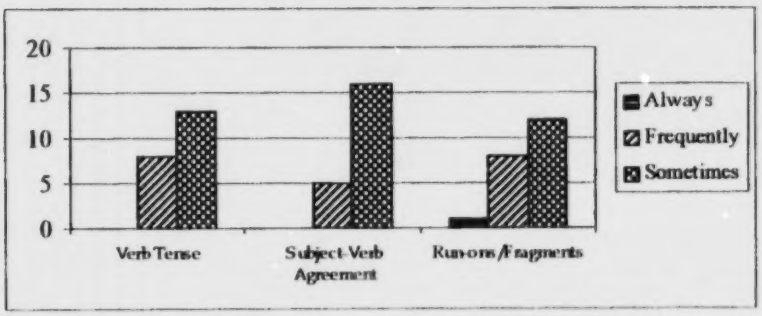


N = 21

Figure 2.1 Number and teacher participants response of students' use of language mechanics

Figure 2.2, outlines teacher participants' perceptions of students' use of grammar. Grammar, in this case, was defined as use of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and use of run-ons and/or fragments. Of the 21 teachers surveyed none observed that students always followed the rules of verb tense, 8 believed students frequently followed the rules of verb tense, and 13 noted that students sometimes followed the rules of verb-tense. In the area of subject-verb

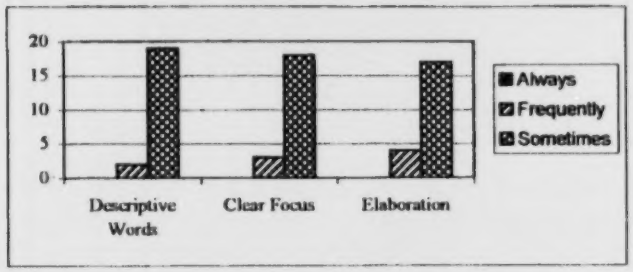
agreement none of the teachers surveyed believed that the students always followed the rules of subject-verb agreement when writing, 5 observed that students frequently did, and 16 noted that students sometimes followed the rules of subject-verb agreement. In the area of students using run-ons/fragments in their writing, 1 teacher believed that the students always used them, 8 observed that the students frequently do, and 12 teachers noted that the students sometimes use run-ons/fragments within in their writing.



N = 21

Figure 2.2 Number and teacher participants' response of students' use of grammar

Figure 2.3 depicts the results of teachers' perceptions of student's use of descriptive words, clear focus, and elaboration in writing, which were defined in this case as "content." Of the 21 participants, none of the teachers observed that their students always used descriptive words in their writing, 2 noted that the students frequently used them and 19 of the teachers believed that the students sometimes used descriptive words in their writing.

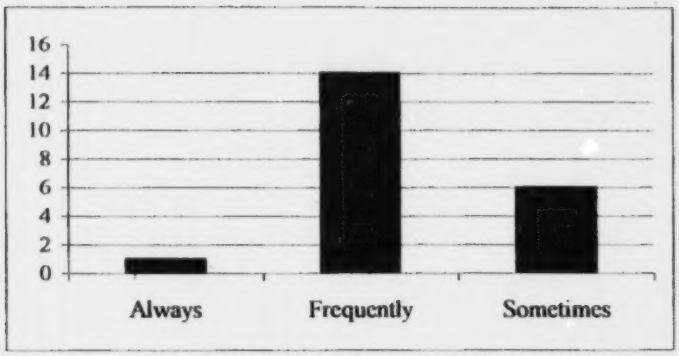


N= 21

Figure 2.3 Number and teacher participants' response of students' use of content

For the category of students maintaining a clear focus in their writing none of the teachers observed that their students always did, 3 noted that students frequently did, and 18 believed that students sometimes maintained a clear focus when writing. For Elaboration within their writing none of the 21 teachers reported that students always elaborated, 4 noted that students frequently did and 17 believed that students sometimes used elaboration in their writing.

The last item on the survey addressed teachers' use of multiple assessment tools when reviewing students' writing (Figure 2.4). Out of the 21 teachers surveyed 1 stated that she always used multiple assessment tools, 14 reported frequently used multiple assessments and 6 sometimes used multiple assessments to assess students' writing.

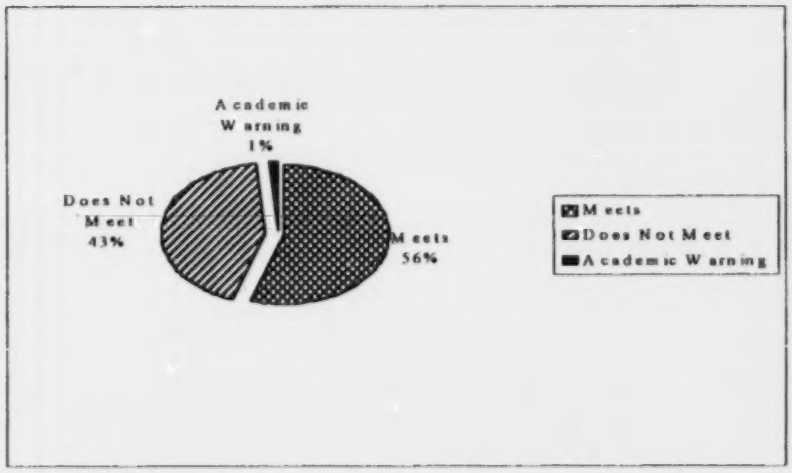


N = 21

Figure 2.4 Number and teacher participants' response of use of multiple assessment tools

Figure 2.5, shows the results of the third grade students' ISAT scores for the targeted fifth-grade class. Of the 69 students tested in grade three, 56% met standards, 43% did not meet standards, and 1% received an academic warning.

Third Grade ISAT Writing Results



N = 69

Figure 2.5 Percentages and results of students' performance on state writing test

The observation checklists (Appendix B and C) were administered by the researchers to the targeted first grade (classrooms A, B, C) and fifth grade (classroom D). The targeted classrooms consisted of 41 first grade students and 69 fifth grade students. All students participated in the action research project; however, the scores were only reported from the students who returned the authorization form with parental consent. A table showing the initial observation checklist results, which were collected prior to the start of the intervention is presented in Tables One through Four.

In Table 2.1, the results show that 1 out of 17 students always followed the rules of capitalization, 3 sometimes did and 13 of them never followed the rules of capitalization. In the area of punctuation, 3 students always followed the rules, 3 sometimes and 11 students never followed the rules of punctuation. All students were unable to identify the verb tense of a sentence as well as orally produce a complete sentence using descriptive words.

Table 2.1

Pre-Intervention Writing Observation Checklist for Classroom A

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Followed Rules of Capitalization	1	3	13
Followed Rules of Punctuation	3	3	11
Identified Verb Tense	0	0	17
Used Descriptive Words	0	0	17

N = 17

In Table 2.2, the results show that 5 out of 20 students always followed the rules of capitalization, 13 sometimes did and 2 of them never followed the rules of capitalization. In the area of punctuation, 5 students always followed the rules, 10 sometimes and 5 students never followed the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, 3 always identified the verb tense, 9 sometimes did and 8 were unable to identify the verb tense. Out of the 20 students, 1 student was able to orally produce a sentence using descriptive words, 11 were able to do it sometimes and 8 were unable to produce a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 2.2

Pre-Intervention Writing Observation Checklist for Classroom B

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Followed Rules of Capitalization	5	13	2
Followed Rules of Punctuation	5	10	5
Identified Verb Tense	3	9	8
Used Descriptive Words	1	11	8

N = 20

In Table 2.3, the results show that the students were unable to follow the rules of capitalization and punctuation. One student out of the four was able to sometimes identify the verb tense of a sentence and 3 were unable to identify the verb tense. One student was able to orally produce a sentence using descriptive words and 3 students were unable to produce a sentence using descriptive words.

Table 2.3

Pre-Intervention Writing Observation Checklist for Classroom C

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Followed Rules of Capitalization	0	0	4
Followed Rules of Punctuation	0	0	4
Identified Verb Tense	0	1	3
Used Descriptive Words	0	1	3

N = 4

In Table 2.4, the results show that 44 out of 69 students always followed the rules of capitalization, 25 sometimes did and none of them never followed the rules of capitalization. In the area of punctuation, 25 students always followed the rules, 30 sometimes and 14 students never followed the rules of punctuation. When following the rules of subject-verb agreement, 4 always followed the rules of subject-verb agreement, 18 sometimes did and 2 were unable to follow the rules of subject-verb agreement. Out of the 69 students, 11 students used details when writing, 41 were able to do it sometimes and 16 were unable to use details when writing.

Table 2.4

Pre-Intervention Writing Observation Checklist for Classroom D

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Followed Rules of Capitalization	44	25	0
Followed Rules of Punctuation	25	30	14
Followed Rules of Subject-Verb Agreement	49	18	2
Used Details	11	42	16

N = 69

Probable Causes

There are many factors influencing students' difficulties with writing. Among those cited in the literature and exhibited among the targeted students for this study were: attitudes and motivation, environmental factors, instructional techniques and learning disabilities. A review of the literature related to these areas is presented next along with any related site-specific information.

Attitudes and Motivation

As students mature, many experience a less positive attitude towards writing (Kear, Coffman, McKenna & Ambriosio, 2000) and feel pressured to become good writers (Nolan, 2001). Curriculum and instruction in writing for older students can inadvertently reinforce students' apathy towards writing by emphasizing the acquisition of basic skills over more creative approaches. As a result, some students lose sight of writing as a fun activity. As motivation towards writing decreases, Kear et al. added that students begin to lose ownership, confidence, and the ability to perform well when assigned writing tasks. In contrast, younger

students are introduced to writing in kindergarten and often view their newly acquired skills as fun. In this context, students tended to view writing as a game and most are genuinely excited about the process.

Environmental Factors

The context in which students' experience the writing process influences their attitudes and motivation for writing (Essex, 1996). Essex observed that administrators and parents tend to overlook the relevance of environmental factors and often mistake writing as less important than other areas of the curriculum.

In these situations, Essex observed further that teachers also underestimate students' cognitive ability and communication skills. As students lose valuable opportunities to choose subjects of interest to them or methods of writing that reflect their individual needs, academic performance may be negatively affected.

Taylor and Adelman (1999) noted that reading and writing difficulties are influenced by socioeconomic inequalities and the failure of some teachers and administrators to adopt instruction for students with language barriers. While policymakers also emphasize standards, students with language barriers are often left behind. Given this, many become less proficient in reading and writing.

Townsend and Danling (1997) stated that students whose home language differs from the language used in school are at a higher rate of failure. Children who come from literacy enriched homes generally have more proficient writing skills. Gender, socioeconomic status, and race also tend to influence students' writing skills (Wildavsky, 1999). For example, boys tend to be less proficient writers than girls, and students with low-income also tend to have poor

writing skills. In addition, students from low-income backgrounds tend not to have sufficient support from home, teachers, and administrators to be successful (Wildavsky, 1999).

Instructional Techniques

Nickel (2001), stated that a lack of communication may exist between students and teachers during writing instruction which leads to unclear expectations. Also, students feel confused by teachers' comments if suggestions are not clearly stated and may perceive teachers' feedback instead as criticism of their writing. Students' poor writing skills can be directly attributed to the absence of clear and explicit instruction by teachers (MacArthur, Schwartz, Graham & Harris, 1996). In addition, poor modeling of writing strategies can defer or "turn off" students from getting excited and feeling good about their writing. Wolf and White (2000), reported that the inappropriate use of assessment can also lead to an unrealistic measure of students writing abilities and progress. Assessments that are only used to measure current achievement levels of students do not monitor or take into consideration students' achievement or progress over time.

Learning Disabilities

Thomas (1996), stated that problems in writing for students with learning disabilities lie in the areas of productivity, adapting language styles to other people, activating prior knowledge on topic and overall students' knowledge on the framework of writing. Many teachers are not providing the sequential detail and repetition required for students with learning disabilities to master the skills needed to be successful writers. In addition, many teachers have students with special needs practice skills related to writing without helping students to recognize how these skills can be utilized for authentic writing (Thomas, 1996). Wong, et al. (1997), also observed

that students with learning disabilities tend to have problems that go beyond mechanics, and that many lack knowledge of the writing process and what constitutes a good writer.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed a number of strategies for improving students' writing. Among these, seven have emerged as possible solutions in helping students become more proficient writers: authentic writing assessment, portfolios, journal writing, student motivation, guided writing, writing across the curriculum, and the writing process. Each of these are explained in the sections that follow. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of the decisions made during the action research that reflect the literature.

Authentic Writing Assessment

Providing authentic assessment for the students is essential to increasing student performance across the curriculum (Schaefer, 2001). In the areas of writing, some examples of authentic assessment include rubrics, checklists and portfolios. Andrade (2000), stated that rubrics are used to promote both thinking and learning. In an effective writing rubric, the key component is the inclusion of an explicit grading criteria (Glazer, 994). The criteria used in a rubric provides for the students, a clear guideline of the teacher's expectations. Speck (2000), agreed that teachers need to communicate to their students what is expected to create effective writing assignments.

Portfolios

Portfolios can be used as an alternative strategy for an effective writing assessment (Manning, 2000). A portfolio is an organized collection of student work and self reflection. In addition to student's work, portfolios contain anecdotal notes made by the teacher about student writing samples (Manning & Manning, 1996). Portfolios can provide an opportunity for parental involvement. An active portfolio requires that parents and students reflect on the written work chosen for the portfolio (Manning, 2000 & Wilcox, 1997). The reflection process is an essential element in creating portfolios where the students can see how they think, work, and change over time (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999). Hansen (1998), stated that the use of portfolios should be used as a form of assessment for students of all abilities.

Journal Writing

Journal writing allows students to write creatively on a given topic. Essex (1999), stated the necessity of creative writing. He gave seven reasons why children should write: to entertain, artistic expression, to explore the functions and values of writing, to stimulate imagination, to clarify thinking, to search for identity, and to learn to read and write.

Journal writing is the first step in preparing students for many other forms of successful writing experiences. Shaeffer (2001), stated that the success of student journal writing depends on clearly stating the purpose and modeling the procedure for the students. Educators also need to relay the importance of journal writing with their students (Smith, 2000). Students should be encouraged to share their journals with their peers in order to build their confidence. Montgomery (2001), noted that there are three strategies that should be implemented for the sharing process, such as, buddy journals, dialog journals, and character study journals.

Student Motivation

According to Gleason and Issacson (2001), the motivation to write must be present for students to be successful. Some ways to make writing more meaningful for the students is to provide real life purposes for them to write about as well as making them choose their own topics. Poindexter and Oliver (1998), stated that children tend to learn to write faster, better, and more joyfully when they do so for their own purposes.

Guided Writing

Guided writing is used by a teacher as part of the modeling process for teaching writing. The beginning of the guided writing process consists of the teacher instructing the students to copy teacher generated sentences from the board. After frequently modeling this process, the students should transition into independent writers. Hedrick and Parish (1999), stated that an additional component of guided writing is called writing aloud/shared writing. Writing aloud/shared writing involves the teacher modeling her thinking by talking out loud as she is writing. The students will follow the process.

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing across the curriculum involves the students' writing during all subject areas (Sorenson, 1991). This may include writing during math, social studies, and science in addition to the language arts. Students not only receive more practice perfecting their writing, but also begin to see a purpose for their own writing. Writing is, then, done several times throughout the day. Sorenson (2001), found that students expressed less apprehension about their writing and felt that they became better writers when their writing was more varied, more complex, and more mature.

The Writing Process

The writing process consists of prewriting, writing, revising and publishing (Marchison & Alber, 2001). In order for the writing process to be successful, the teacher must model each stage. Schaefer (2001), stated that if we want students to become strong writers, we have to make the steps of the writing process and the standards of good writing very clear.

The writing process also allows students the opportunity to take ownership of their work and grow through the stages of writing (Marchison & Alber, 2001). During these stages, students can work collaboratively to assist each other with writing, revising, editing and illustrating. As stated by Davenport and Eckberg (2002), when students work collaboratively on the writing process, they are more likely to take risks while learning to work together to complete the tasks and receive feedback from peers. The focus of process oriented writing instruction is to stimulate students to think about their writing and reflect on their ideas. The use of this technique is related to higher performance. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

In conclusion, researchers reveal many effective strategies that can be implemented within the classroom to improve students' writing. Among the strategies identified, authentic writing assessment, portfolios, journal writing, student motivation, guided writing, writing across the curriculum and the writing process. With implementation of the strategies noted, teachers will have a better opportunity to assist students with becoming more proficient writers.

Project Objective

As a result of writing portfolios and journals during the periods of September through December, 2002 students in the targeted first and fifth grade classrooms will improve their writing skills as measured by a survey, observations, and document analysis, logs and journal writing rubrics.

Process Statements

To accomplish the project objective the curriculum will be modified by including writing portfolios on an ongoing basis (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999; Hansen, 1998; Manning & Manning, 1996; Manning, 2000; Wilcox, 1997). Implementation of a weekly journal will also be utilized to accomplish the project objective(Essex, 1996; Montgomery, 2001; Scharfer, 2001; Smith, 2000).

Project Action Plan

The action plan is presented in outline form. This allows all teachers involved to have an organized format to follow in order to implement strategies to improve student writing. The schedule covers the time frame from September thru December.

Week One

- Administer Teacher Survey on Writing Skills (Appendix A)
- Assess students writing skills through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)

Week Two

- Review students previous standardized test scores through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix E) (5th grade)
- Create lesson plans on capitalization at the beginning of a sentence (1st grade)
- Create lessons plans on sentence structure (5th grade)
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on capitalization at the beginning of a sentence (1st grade

- Implement lesson activities on sentence structure (5th grade)
- Observe targeted writing skill through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)
- Introduce portfolios
- Student-Teacher conferences to reflect on writing portfolio

Week Three

- Continue lessons on capitalization at the beginning of a sentence (1st grade)
- Create lesson plans for paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on capitalization at the beginning of a sentence (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Students add writing products to the portfolio
- Review writing portfolios through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix E)

Week Four

- Create lesson plans on punctuation (1st grade)
- Continue lesson plans on paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Introduce journal writing
- Model targeted writing skills
- Implement lesson activities on punctuation (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Observe targeted writing skill through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolio.

- Student-Teacher conferences to reflect on writing portfolio

Week Five

- Continue lesson plans for punctuation (1st grade)
- Continue lesson plans for paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted writing skills
- Implement lesson activities on punctuation (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on paragraph writing (5th grade)
- Assess journal writing through the use of the rubric (Appendix D)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolio
- Review writing portfolio through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix E)

Week Six

- Create lesson plans for word spacing (1st grade)
- Create lesson plans for adding details to paragraphs (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on word spacing (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on adding details to paragraphs (5th grade)
- Observe targeted writing skill through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)
- Assess journal writing using the rubric (Appendix D)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolio

- Student-Teacher conferences to reflect on writing portfolio

Week Seven

- Continue lesson plans for word spacing (1st grade)
- Continue lesson plans for adding details to paragraphs (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on word spacing (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on adding details to paragraphs (5th grade)
- Assess journal writing through the use of the rubric (Appendix D)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolios
- Review writing portfolios through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix E)

Week Eight

- Create lesson plans for using descriptive words (1st grade)
- Create lesson plans for editing paragraphs (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on adjectives (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on editing (5th grade)
- Observe targeted skill through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)
- Assess journal writing through rubric (Appendix D)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolios
- Student-Teacher conferences to reflect on writing portfolio

Week Nine

- Continue lesson plans for descriptive words (1st grade)
- Continue lesson plans for editing (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted writing skill
- Implement lesson activities on descriptive words (1st grade)
- Implement lesson activities on editing (5th grade)
- Assess journal writing through the use of the rubric (Appendix D)
- Students add writing assignments to portfolios
- Review writing portfolios through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix E)

Week Ten

- Create lesson plans for finalizing writing portfolio in targeted classrooms
- Create lesson plans for revising (5th grade)
- Continue journal writing
- Model targeted skills
- Implementing culmination of writing portfolio
- Implementing lesson activities on revising (5th grade)
- Observe targeted skill through the use of the Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C)
- Assess journal writing through the use of the rubric (Appendix D)
- Students finish mid-year portfolio
- Review final portfolio through the use of the Document Analysis Log (Appendix

Method of Assessment

The progress of the students' writing skills was documented by various forms of assessment: a survey, observations and a document analysis. A survey was administered to teachers in order to provide insight on possible problems related to students' writing performance. Observations involved a behavior checklist designed to assist researchers with analyzing students' writing skills. A document analysis involving a review of students' journals was used to assist researchers with documenting students' progress on class writing assignments.

The Teacher Survey (Appendix A) included ten questions each with four possible solutions regarding students' writing performance. The surveys were administered by the researchers to 18 teachers in the targeted elementary school during the first two weeks of September. Researchers placed the surveys in the mailboxes of all teacher participants along with instructions to return the surveys to the researchers' mailboxes in a sealed envelope provided for this purpose. Teacher participants were instructed to omit any reference to actual names. Researchers collected the surveys daily. The survey was designed to assist researchers with analyzing students' writing performance and identifying teachers' perceptions at the targeted site prior to interventions.

The Observation Checklist (Appendix B & C) included four components each regarding students' prior knowledge on writing performance. Appendix B was used to observe students in the targeted first grades and Appendix C was used in the targeted fifth grades. Researchers used the checklist biweekly throughout the study to document the writing performance of 100 participants. Researchers verbally provided examples and observed students responses in the areas of mechanics, grammar, and elaboration when writing. Researchers then recorded whether or not students exhibited any of the four skills noted on the checklist by using a symbol code

regarding their progress. The checklists were designed to assist the researchers with analyzing the students' performance in writing skills.

The Journal Writing Rubric (Appendix D) was used by the researchers to document the writing performance of 100 students in the targeted first and fifth grade classrooms. The rubric was used on a weekly basis throughout the study beginning in October and ending in December. The Journal Writing Rubric included four components each related to students' writing (mechanics, grammar, descriptive language and paragraph/sentence focus). Also included were four assessment levels in which the researchers used to rate each component. Researchers used the rubric following journal writing assignments. The Journal Writing Rubric was designed to assist researchers with analyzing students' progress in written language skills during the intervention.

The Document Analysis Log (Appendix E) was used by the researchers to catalog data for 100 participants in the targeted first and fifth grade classrooms. Researchers used the log on a weekly basis throughout the study beginning in September and ending in December. Following a review of various classroom assessments, researchers recorded the type of assessment noted and made comments regarding students' performance. The Document Analysis Log was designed to assist researchers with documenting students' progress during the intervention.

To protect confidentiality of the participants involved, the researchers omitted all references to actual names. To further protect their anonymity, the participants were assigned a numerical code. In addition to the omission of participant names, all data collected was stored in a locked file cabinet located within the researchers' classrooms.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of our action research was to improve writing skills at first and fifth grade levels. We attempted to achieve this through the use of observation checklists, journal assessed through using rubrics, document analysis logs and a collection of writing portfolios. The intervention was used in four classrooms at the same elementary school. While our teaching styles vary, we all used the project objective, action plan and processes to guide our instruction.

First Grade Classrooms

Three first grade classrooms participated in the study (hereinafter referred to as A, B,C). In Classrooms A & B, the desks were arranged in cooperative groups of five to six students to allow for collaboration between the students. In Classroom C, the desks were arranged traditionally in rows. In each room there is a word wall, word family posters and word family dictionaries to assist with writing.

Throughout the intervention with first grade students, researchers used numerous lessons, journal writing and portfolios for writing instruction. Writing lessons during the ten weeks of intervention typically began with a mini lesson focusing on the targeted skill. These skills included capitalization, punctuation, word spacing and the use of descriptive words. Researchers modeled the targeted writing skill and provided sentences with punctuation and grammatical errors for students to correct.

During writing time, researchers supplied students with prompts related to the curriculum and then provided time for students to write about the topic presented. On a bi-weekly basis, researchers discussed students' work during a teacher-student writing conference. The work discussed was pulled from students' portfolios which were maintained throughout the project. The main objective during conferencing was to guide students through reflections about their writing. After conferencing, researchers filed students' writing samples in a folder labeled with their names and placed these into hanging file portfolios.

Journal writing was also incorporated into the morning Language Arts curriculum and used as an intervention. Each journal entry began with a writing prompt provided for students which was written daily on the chalkboard. Upon completion of journal entries, students created illustrations related to their writing. Researchers reviewed students' journal entries periodically and made corrections as well as provided comments about students' progress. Each students' journal was bound and placed in a central area of the classroom in order for the children to review their work during class free time.

Fifth Grade Classroom D

One fifth grade classroom participated in the study and is hereinafter referred to as Classroom D. Desks in Classroom D were arranged in groups of two or three. Many activities allowed students to work collaboratively with a partner or with others around them. The classroom contained learning centers that consisted of monthly themes and the researcher used reading and grammar activities to assist with writing. Posters were also hung on walls in easily visible areas and used as writing guides. The posters displayed paragraph organization, transition words, a self-checklist and an overview of the writing process.

Throughout the intervention numerous lessons were taught capitalization, punctuation, verb/subject agreement. Journal writing and the use of portfolios were also used to help improve students' writing abilities. A typical writing lesson began with a mini-lesson on the targeted skill, with each skill presented for a two-week period. Each lesson began with the researcher modeling the targeted skill, then students working independently to assess their work.

Journal writing was used once a week and students were supplied topics related to a novel being covered in their reading class. Students were given 30 minutes to write about the topic, and a rubric was used to assess their writing progress. During teacher-student conferences rubrics were also used to review the targeted skill with students. Journals were then placed in students' working portfolios. The working portfolios were located in hanging files in the back of the classroom with each students' name clearly marked on the portfolio. Student portfolios were used to encourage students' reflection on their writing. Students reflected on work completed on a bi-weekly basis for each targeted skill. The students and researcher each chose on assignment for further reflection and placed these in students' portfolios. The portfolios were then stored in a hanging file located in the back of the classroom. After students decorated the cover of their portfolio, they were left on students' desks for parents to view during parent teacher conferences.

Throughout the course of the ten weeks, the researchers made adaptations to the intervention to incorporate changes in schedules. For example, researchers were not always able to conference with students as originally planned. On some days the classroom was simply monitored and during these times researchers helped students as needed and conferenced with them individually during silent reading. On other days, roaming conferences were used, where the researchers would approach students at their desk and check their writing. Additional adaptations were needed in Classroom C. Students in Classroom C participated in journal

writing activities and a teacher-student conference immediately following each daily entry. During these conferences students' errors were identified and corrected. Also, writing samples from the students in Classroom C never reached the ten week deadline for assessing their writing using the writing rubric as implemented in Classroom A & B.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Observation Checklist

Intervention began after the baseline data was collected. Every two weeks the researchers introduced a new writing skill through a direct instruction lesson. The researcher provided a writing prompt to the students and gave them independent time to utilize the targeted skill. The writing samples were then assessed using the observation checklist (Appendix B & Appendix C). The scoring categories consisted of always, sometimes and never.

In Table 4.1, the results show that 3 out of 17 students always followed the rules of capitalization, 12 sometimes and 2 never followed the rules of capitalization. In the area of punctuation, 6 students always followed the rules, 7 sometimes and 4 never.

Table 4.1

Student Results from Classroom A on Observation Checklist for Week Two

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Followed Rules of Capitalization	3	12	2
Followed Rules of Punctuation	6	7	4
Identified Verb Tense	5	3	9
Used Descriptive Words	0	0	17

N = 17

When identifying proper verb tense, 5 participants always were able to identify verb tense, 3 sometimes and 9 never. Out of 17 students, 0 students were able to produce a sentence using descriptive words.

Table 4.2 represents the observation checklist for week six of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 9 participants always followed the rules, 5 sometimes did and 3 never did. Five students out of 17 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation, 2 sometimes were able and 10 were unable to follow the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, 8 always identified the verb tense, 3 sometimes did and 6 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of the 17 students, 6 were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words, 1 student sometimes did and 10 students never produced a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 4.2

Student Results from Classroom A on Observation Checklist from Week Six

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	9	5	3
Follows Rules of Punctuation	5	2	10
Identified Verb Tense	8	3	6
Used Descriptive Words	6	1	10

N = 17

Table 4.3 represents the final observation checklist for the last week of intervention. Ten students were always able to follow the rules of capitalization, and the remaining 7 students sometimes followed the rules of capitalization. In the area of punctuation, 10 students always followed the rules, and the remaining 7 sometimes followed the rules. When identifying proper verb tense, 14 always identified proper verb tense, and 3 sometimes identified proper verb tense. All 17 students were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words.

Table 4.3

Final Observation Checklist for Classroom A

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	10	7	0
Follows Rules of Punctuation	10	7	0
Identified Verb Tense	14	3	0
Used Descriptive Words	17	0	0

N = 17

Table 4.4 represents the observation checklist for Classroom B in week two of the intervention. In the area of capitalization none of the participants were able to always follow the rules, 15 sometimes did and 5 never did. Three students out of 20 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation, 14 sometimes were able and 3 were unable to follow the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, none of them were able to always able to identify the verb tense, 17 sometimes did and 3 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of 20

students, 3 were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words, 14 were sometimes able and 3 were unable to produce a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 4.4

Student Results from Classroom B on Observation Checklist from Week Two

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	0	15	5
Follows Rules of Punctuation	3	14	3
Identified Verb Tense	0	17	3
Used Descriptive Words	3	14	3

N = 20

Table 4.5 represents the observation checklist for week six of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 10 participants always followed the rules, 8 sometimes did and 2 never did. Eight students out of 20 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation, 8 sometimes were able and 4 were unable to follow the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, 8 always identified the verb tense, 9 sometimes did and 3 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of the 20 students, 4 were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words, 13 were sometimes able and 3 were unable to produce a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 4.5

Student Results from Classroom B on Observation Checklist from Week Four

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	10	8	2
Follows Rules of Punctuation	8	8	4
Identified Verb Tense	8	9	3
Used Descriptive Words	4	13	3

N = 20

Table 4.6 represents the observation checklist for week ten of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 12 participants always followed the rules, 5 sometimes did and 1 never did. Thirteen students out of 20 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation, 5 sometimes were able to and 2 were unable to follow the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, 9 always identified the verb tense, 8 sometimes did and 3 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of 20 students, 5 were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words, 12 were sometimes able and 3 were unable to produce a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 4.7 represents the observation checklist for Classroom C in week two of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, none of the students were able to follow the rules of capitalization or punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, 1 sometimes did and 3 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of 4 students, 1 was sometimes able to produce a sentence using descriptive words and 3 were unable to produce a sentence with descriptive words.

Table 4.6

Final Observation Checklist for Classroom B

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows the Rules of Capitalization	12	5	3
Follows the Rules of Punctuation	13	5	2
Identified Verb Tense	9	8	3
Used Descriptive Words	5	12	3

N = 20

Table 4.7

Student Results from Observation Checklist on Classroom C from Week Two

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows the Rules of Capitalization	0	0	4
Follows the Rules of Punctuation	0	0	4
Identified Verb Tense	0	1	3
Used Descriptive Words	0	1	3

N = 4

Table 4.8 represents the observation checklist for week six of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 2 participants always followed the rules and 2 sometimes did. All 4 students were always able to follow the rules of punctuation. When identifying proper verb tense, none of the students were able to always correctly identify the verb tense, 1 student

sometimes did and 3 were unable to identify verb tense. Out of the 4 students, none of them were always able to produce a sentence using descriptive words, 1 of them was able to sometimes and 3 were unable to produce a sentence using descriptive words.

Table 4.8

Student Results from Observation Checklist on Classroom C from Week Six

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows the Rules of Capitalization	2	2	0
Follows the Rules of Punctuation	4	0	0
Identified Verb Tense	0	1	3
Used Descriptive Words	0	1	3

N = 4

Table 4.9 represents the observation checklist for the final week of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 3 participants always followed the rules and 1 sometimes did. All 4 students were always able to follow the rules of punctuation. All 4 students were sometimes able to identify proper verb tense and produce a sentence using descriptive words.

Table 4.10 represents the observation checklist for Classroom D in week two of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 49 participants always followed the rules, 20 sometimes did and none of the participants never did. Sixty-three students out of the 69 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation and 6 students sometimes were able to. When

identifying proper subject verb agreement, 34 always identified the proper subject verb agreement, 34 sometimes did and 1 was unable to identify subject verb agreement.

Table 4.9

Final Observation Checklist on Classroom C

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows the Rules of Capitalization	3	1	0
Follows the Rules of Punctuation	4	0	0
Identified Verb Tense	0	4	0
Used Descriptive Words	0	4	0

N = 4

Out of the 69 students, 55 were always able to use details when writing, 11 were sometimes able and 3 were unable to write using details.

Table 4.11 represents the observation checklist for Classroom D in week six of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 60 participants always followed the rules and the remaining 9 sometimes did. Sixty-six students out of 69 were always able to follow the rules of punctuation and 3 students sometimes were able to. When identifying proper subject verb agreement, 62 always identified the proper subject agreement, 6 sometimes did and 1 was unable to identify subject verb agreement. Out of 69 students, 35 were always able to use details when writing, 33 were sometimes able and 1 was unable to write using details.

Table 4.10

Student Results from Observation Checklist on Classroom D from Week Two

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	49	20	0
Follows Rules of Punctuation	63	6	0
Identified Subject Verb Agreement	34	34	1
Used Details	55	11	3

N = 69

Table 4.11

Students Results from Observation Checklist on Classroom D from Week Six

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	60	9	0
Follows Rules of Punctuation	66	3	0
Identified Subject Verb Agreement	62	6	1
Used Details	35	33	1

N = 69

Table 4.12 represents the observation checklist for Classroom D in the final week of the intervention. In the area of capitalization, 66 participants always followed the rules and the remaining 3 sometimes did. Sixty-six students out of 69 were always able to follow the rules of

punctuation and 3 students were sometimes able to. When identifying proper subject verb agreement, 67 always identified the proper subject verb agreement and 2 sometimes were able to identify subject verb agreement. Out of 69 students, 43 were always able to use details when writing, 25 were sometimes able and 1 was unable to write using details.

Table 4.12

Final Observation Checklist on Classroom D from Week Ten

	Frequency		
Skills Observed	Always	Sometimes	Never
Follows Rules of Capitalization	66	3	0
Follows Rules of Punctuation	66	3	0
Identified Subject Verb Agreement	67	2	0
Used Details	43	25	1

N = 69

Rubrics

During the fourth week of the research, the researchers in Classrooms A,B, and D introduced the assessment tool of rubrics to the students in their respective classrooms. The next week, week five, the rubrics were used to assess the students' journal writing. The rubric was based on the four areas of writing criteria: mechanics, grammar, descriptive language and focus. The maximum amount of points possible that a student was able to earn for each component on the rubric was 4 points with the total amount possible for the entire rubric of 16 points.

Table 4.13 represents the results from the writing rubric from Classroom A from the fifth, seventh and tenth week of intervention. In week five, the student scores ranged from 4 to 12

points. By week seven, scores improved from the lowest score of 4 points to a low of 8. The biggest improvement was shown between weeks seven and ten. Scores in week ten ranged from a low of eleven to a high of 16.

Table 4.13

Students' Results from Classroom A on Writing Rubric

	Total Score		
Students in Classroom A	Week Five	Week Seven	Week Ten
P1	8	11	16
P2	4	8	15
P3	9	11	15
P4	7	8	14
P5	10	12	11
P6	12	13	15
P7	10	12	15
P8	11	13	15
P9	8	12	15
P10	9	11	15
P11	10	10	15
P12	8	10	15
P13	4	11	13
P14	8	12	15
P15	9	12	15
P16	12	12	14
P17	4	9	12

P = Participant
N = 16

Table 4.14 shows the results of ten students writing rubric scores from week five, seven and ten. In week five, student scores ranged from a low of 5 points and a high of 9 points. By week seven, the majority of the students' scores showed improvement. The biggest improvement was shown between week seven and ten with the lowest score of 8 and the highest score of 16.

Table 4.14

Students' Results from Classroom B on Writing Rubric

	Total Score		
Students in Classroom B	Week Five	Week Seven	Week Ten
P1	6	9	11
P2	8	8	8
P3	5	8	8
P4	9	8	11
P5	9	7	16
P6	8	8	12
P7	8	7	8
P8	8	8	12
P9	8	7	8
P10	8	8	8
P11	8	8	8
P12	8	8	8
P13	5	4	4
P14	5	8	8
P15	5	8	8
P16	5	8	8
P17	8	8	12
P18	8	9	12
P19	8	8	12
P20	8	8	12

P= Participant
N = 16

Table 4.15 represents the results from the writing rubric from students one through 1 to 33 for Classroom D from the fifth, seventh and tenth weeks of intervention. In week five, students' scores ranged from 4 to 16. By week seven, students improved from a low score of 9 to a highest score of 16. In week ten, the students showed improvement with a low score of 12 to high score of 16.

Table 4.15

Student Results from Classroom D on Writing Rubric

	Total Score		
Students in Classroom D	Week Five	Week Seven	Week Ten
P1	12	14	15
P2	13	11	14
P3	12	15	14
P4	14	10	14
P5	6	15	15
P6	16	15	16
P7	14	16	15
P8	13	11	16
P9	9	10	15
P10	10	16	15
P11	16	9	15
P12	12	11	12
P13	7	16	15
P14	11	11	15
P15	8	11	15
P16	12	13	12
P17	10	10	16
P18	8	11	15
P19	12	14	15
P20	11	16	16
P21	16	10	15
P22	16	16	15
P23	4	16	16
P24	13	14	16
P25	16	16	16
P26	11	14	16
P27	16	14	16
P28	16	14	16
P29	9	15	15
P30	12	13	15
P31	11	14	15
P32	7	16	16
P33	16	16	16

P = Participant
N = 16

Table 4.16

Student Results from Classroom D on Writing Rubric

	Total Score		
Students in Classroom D	Week Five	Week Seven	Week Ten
P34	15	16	16
P35	9	13	16
P36	9	16	16
P37	14	14	16
P38	12	16	16
P39	9	12	15
P40	16	16	16
P41	14	15	15
P42	16	16	16
P43	12	16	16
P44	11	11	16
P45	16	16	16
P46	11	13	15
P47	14	15	15
P48	14	14	16
P49	7	12	15
P50	13	16	16
P51	16	16	16
P52	6	16	16
P53	8	14	15
P54	16	16	16
P55	14	16	16
P56	4	15	15
P57	11	12	15
P58	13	13	15
P59	13	15	16
P60	15	15	16
P61	13	14	15
P62	9	16	16
P63	14	14	16
P64	16	16	16
P65	10	10	13
P66	12	14	15
P67	11	16	16
P68	10	12	14
P69	11	13	14

P = Participant
N = 16

Table 4.16 represents the results from students 34 to 69 in Classroom D from the fifth, seventh and tenth weeks of intervention. In week five, the students' scores ranged from a 4 to a 16. By week seven, the students showed improvement with the lowest score of 10 and a high score of 16. By week ten, the students showed improvement with a low score of 13 and a high score of 16.

The students' writing in Classroom C did progress to the point where it could be assessed through the use of a rubric. Therefore, there are no results presented on a table from Classroom C for writing rubrics.

Document Analysis Logs

A document analysis log (Appendix E) was used to comment on the students' reflection of their own work. After the students completed a writing assignment, the assignment was assessed using the observation checklist. The students then reflected on their writing. We reviewed their reflections and commented using the document analysis. Within their reflections, we looked for and commented on the students' honesty and insightful comments for possible goal setting for future assignments. Neatness, handwriting and correct usage of writing skills were also considered.

Throughout the ten weeks of the intervention, Classroom A completed several reflections of their writing. The beginning reflections were lacking in details, honesty and neatness. Many students did not take ownership for their mistakes and/or did not follow directions. As the weeks went by, the students' reflections became more truthful. Many students began to recognize their mistakes in both capitalization and punctuation. Some students still showed signs of confusion about a true reflection at the end of the intervention.

Classroom B completed several reflections about their writing during the course of the 10 weeks of intervention. The students' reflections early in the intervention were not very detailed and did not accurately reflect about their writing. As the intervention progressed, the students' reflections became more honest and detailed as they understood the process better. By the end of the intervention, most of the students began to recognize their mistakes and see their improvement and growth, although some of the students continued to find the reflection process difficult.

The reflection process was an area where Classroom C encountered some difficulty. At the beginning of the reflection process, the researcher had to model the steps and had to give many examples for the students to see and hear. After a couple of weeks of modeling, the students started initiating reflective comments, but the comments were directed towards the appearance of their writing (neatness or illustrations) instead of the written product or steps that they went through. Another statement that was common for the students to make was about their errors that occurred throughout their writing. Towards the end of the intervention, two of the students were starting to reflect on the process that they went through while writing.

Throughout the ten weeks of the intervention, Classroom D completed several reflections on their writing. During the first four weeks of reflecting many students found difficulty reflecting on their work. The students tended to focus more on neatness than on content. As the intervention progressed, the students began to see improvements in the areas of language mechanics and grammar. Their reflections became more honest and detailed. The students were then able to use their reflections as tools to help with the writing process. Through the use of reflection; the students were able to take ownership over their work. By the end of the intervention, all students were able to identify their areas of improvement.

Conclusions

As previously stated students in the targeted elementary school exhibited difficulty writing at the first and fifth grade levels. Through the intervention, students showed a steady increase in their writing skills as well as their interest in their own writing. Students' writing was assessed using checklists, rubrics, and document analysis logs. The two interventions used to help improve their writing were journal writing and portfolios.

Journal Writing

Journal writing, which was incorporated into the morning Language Arts curriculum, was used in all four of the targeted classrooms. This intervention provided an opportunity for the students to practice and incorporate all of the targeted skills the researchers taught. The students enjoyed the journal writing and viewed the activity as a creative and expressive tool. The researchers observed weekly improvements in all areas of students' writing performance. This growth was assessed through the use of a journal writing rubric. The researchers concluded that journal writing, along with the rubric is an effective and useful tool for improving writing skills.

Portfolios

Portfolios were introduced in the four targeted classrooms during the second weeks of the intervention. Students added writing samples to their portfolios weekly and participated in teacher – student conferences biweekly. Portfolios provided an opportunity for students and researchers to see weekly growth and improvement. After completion of a writing assignment, the students reflected on their writing sample. The researchers assessed the students' reflections through the use of the document analysis log. The students found the reflection process difficult at the beginning of the intervention but as they became more comfortable with the process, their

reflections improved. Portfolios were an effective intervention that showed growth and improvement in writing and reflection.

Recommendations

The teacher researchers found that overall this intervention was successful. Some modifications were made with the time allotted for student teacher conferencing due to time constraints in the classrooms. These time constraints included specials, assemblies and/or daily interruptions. If other teachers were to implement this intervention, the researchers recommend allotting plenty of time for daily and ongoing writing activities. More time should also be given towards modeling the steps needed in writing a student reflection. Modeling these steps would help guide the students towards a more honest and accurate understanding of the reflection process.

The researcher in Classroom C found that more modifications were needed in all areas of the intervention due to great deficits in the students' ability levels. The researcher in Classroom D found that working with a large number of participants was both difficult and time consuming. The researcher suggests limiting the number of participants involved in the study.

Implementing these recommendations into the intervention would help lead to a more successful and rewarding experience for all those involved. The students' writing skills improved and are continuing to improve daily. The teacher researchers met their goals and will continue to implement all interventions into their writing curriculum.

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Appendix A
Teacher Survey

Circle one response for each of the ten items.

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
1. Students follow the rules of capitalization when writing.	1	2	3	4
2. Students follow the rules of punctuation when writing.	1	2	3	4
3. Students follow the rules of word spacing when writing.	1	2	3	4
4. Students follow the rules of verb tense when writing.	1	2	3	4
5. Students follow the rules of subject-verb agreement when writing.	1	2	3	4
6. Students use run-ons and/or fragments when writing.	1	2	3	4
7. Students use descriptive words when writing.	1	2	3	4
8. Students maintain a clear focus when writing.	1	2	3	4
9. Students use elaboration when writing.	1	2	3	4
10. I use multiple assessment tools to assess students' writing.	1	2	3	4

Appendix B
Observation Checklist

(+) Always (✓) Sometimes (-) Never

Participant #	Identifies Capital Letters	Orally Identifies Proper Verb Tense	Identifies Punctuation	Orally Produces a Complete Sentence Using Descriptive Words

Appendix C
Observation Checklist

(+) Always (✓) Sometimes (-) Never

Participant #	Follows Rules of Capitalization	Follows Rules of Punctuation	Follows Rules of Subject – Verb Agreement	Uses Details

Appendix D
Journal Writing Rubric

Participant #: _____ Researcher: _____

Date: _____ Title of Work: _____

					Points
	1	2	3	4	
Mechanics	Student shows no knowledge of proper mechanics for written language	Student shows emerging knowledge of proper mechanics for written language	Student shows some knowledge of proper mechanics for written language	Student shows full knowledge of proper mechanics for written language	
Grammar	Student shows no knowledge of proper grammatical usage for written language	Student shows emerging knowledge of proper grammatical usage for written language	Student shows some knowledge of proper grammatical usage for written language	Student shows full knowledge of proper grammatical usage for written language	
Descriptive Language	Student uses no descriptive language in writing	Student uses minimal descriptive language in writing	Student frequently uses descriptive language in writing	Student always uses descriptive language in writing	
Paragraph/ Sentence Focus	Student shows no consistency in sentence/ paragraph writing	Student shows some consistency in sentence/ paragraph writing	Student shows frequent consistency in sentence/ paragraph writing	Student demonstrates full consistency in sentence/ paragraph writing	
				Total	

Appendix E
Document Analysis Log

Date _____

Type of Assessment _____

Participant #	Comment

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